

City of Sparks, Nevada Re-Validates Firefighter PAT

Objective

According to the US Government's Bureau of Labor Statistics, "applicants for municipal fire fighting jobs generally must pass ... tests of strength, physical stamina, coordination, and agility." www.bls.gov/oco As with any personnel assessment technique, these tests must comply with applicable professional and legal guidelines which pertain to the development and use of employment selection procedures.

Because the City of Sparks NV was moving the location of their Firefighter physical abilities test (PAT) and several years had passed since the test had been developed and validated, the city contracted with CPS Human Resource Services to perform a re-validation study of its Firefighter PAT.

Solution

The foundation of any content validation study is a thorough job analysis. A job analysis used to establish the content validity of a PAT focuses exclusively on the critical physical job tasks and corresponding physical skills and abilities. The job analytic process which was conducted for the City of Sparks used a variety of converging methodologies including:

- A literature review
- Subject matter expert (SME) interviews
- Collection of task, skill, and ability ratings via a questionnaire
- A linkage analysis to establish the relationship between physical tasks and corresponding physical skills and abilities
- Technical documentation of the job analysis process and resulting data

In addition to conducting the job analysis which created a nexus between the nine PAT events and the physical skills and abilities required upon entry to the rank of Firefighter, 47 individuals from the City of Sparks Fire Department pre-tested the reconfigured PAT and completed a PAT Validation Questionnaire which was developed specifically for the project. This process provided confirming evidence of the job relatedness and content validity of the PAT. Additionally, it provided performance data which was used in the establishment of the PAT pass point.

The job analysis approach and content validity procedures used to complete this project were designed by the CPS Project Consultant to achieve the project goals as well as to conform with relevant professional and legal guidelines including the Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education, 1999), the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (Federal Register, 1978), and the Principles for the Validation and Use of Personnel Selection Procedures (Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, Inc., 2003).

Results

The project provided the City of Sparks Fire Department with a job-related and legally defensible reconfigured PAT for the rank of Firefighter. The newly designed and validated PAT establishes performance standards which are consistent with the expectations and physical requirements for Firefighter candidates. Consequently, it will allow the City of Sparks to hire Firefighters who possess the requisite physical attributes resulting in a high probability of job success.

The re-validation process was planned and executed as a partnership between Sparks Human Resources, Sparks Fire Department, and CPS Human Resources Services. Involving all three in the partnership allowed all parties to fully accept and endorse the job analysis and validation process.

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